



32: Cleanse Me! (Psalm 51)

What do you do when the sin you tried to hide keeps haunting your heart?
Today we hear how David's cry in Psalm 51 - "Cleanse Me!" - points us to the mercy of God, the hope of forgiveness, and the Savior who restores sinners for His service again.

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teachingnotes

* All Scripture is from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) unless otherwise noted.

CATCH THE CONTEXT

Last week we saw the depth of sin and selfishness that David fell into, David took another man's wife, tried to cover his sin, and then -rather than humble himself & seek forgiveness - arranged for her husband to be killed. Another Biblical writing we call 1 Kings alludes to this same event that marred David's reign:

1 Kings 15:5

For David did what was right in the Lord's sight, and he did not turn aside from anything He had commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hethite.

BIG TRUTH: God exposes the sin we hide to cleanse the sinner He loves.

Psalm 51 is attributed to David, along with many others. We have already seen a couple of Psalms (34, 52, 56, 89) that were tied to events in the writing of Samuel. This psalm appears in the Hebrew text but it's generally thought that these headings are ancient additions by scribes helping the reader to recognize these writings tied to particular events in David's life.

For the choir director. A psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after he had gone to Bathsheba.

Psalm 51:1-2

Be gracious to me, God, according to Your faithful love; according to Your abundant compassion, **blot out my rebellion. Completely wash away my guilt** and **cleanse me from my sin.**

Notice that David refers to God's **faithful love** (*hesed*) - a loyal love that extends forgiveness & offers reconciliation. This loyal love is demonstrated by God's **abundant compassion**. The Scriptures often describe God's character as "**compassionate** and **gracious, slow to anger**, and **forgiving** (Ex 34:6-7)

Blot out, wash away, and **cleanse me** are 3 ways to say the same thing - **FORGIVE ME!**

My rebellion, my guilt, my sin is a 3 layered lament for the wicked things David has done. He is *not dodging* his sin, but *acknowledging* his sin.

Psalm 51:3-4

For I am conscious of my rebellion, and **my sin is always before me**. Against You—You alone—I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight. So You are right when You pass sentence; You are blameless when You judge.

From the first lustful thought, to the taking of Bathsheba, to trying to trick Uriah, to having him killed, to the marriage with Bathsheba, and throughout the pregnancy - that's at least 9 months that David's sin was always stuck in his mind.

🕒 Sin leaves shameful memories in our minds. Sin always STICKS.

Against You alone I have sinned. David *isn't* discounting his sin against Bathsheba nor Uriah. David later mentions his guilt for murder of Uriah later in [Ps 51:14](#). Instead, David's heart is HEAVY about his disregard for God's commands & God's presence.

✗ David had done what many of us have done - tried to push the Presence of God and the truth of His commands to the back burner - to act as if God and His commands don't exist in that moment.

But now, David stops *running FROM God* and turns around and *runs TO God*, admitting "**I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight.**" Knowing he is guilty and knowing God is RIGHTEOUS, David receives the **sentence** that the **righteous & blameless judge** hands down.

Psalm 51:5-6

Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me. Surely **You** desire **integrity** in the inner self, and **You** teach me **wisdom** deep within.

Guilty from conception & birth? This passage is often cited to say that children are born sinful. While there is no doubt that *all are born with sin nature*, and will ultimately sin, *this certainly does NOT mean that God holds an infant responsible for sin that they have not yet committed nor understood*. A just God would never hold someone responsible for sin that they have NOT committed - that is UNJUST.

This is a hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point - David is thoroughly sinful and has been throughout his life. Sin is not just something he did; sin is something deeply rooted in him....and US. David is a sinner in desperate need of forgiveness.

But....David understands that God's desire is for His people to be full of **integrity** and **wisdom** in their souls.

Psalm 51:7-9

Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; **wash me**, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones You have crushed rejoice.

Turn your Face away from my sins and **blot out** all my guilt.

Notice the poetic artistry here: Verses 2-3 David says 1) blot out my rebellion, 2) wash away my guilt, & 3) cleanse me from my sin. Here it is the reverse order: 1) **Purify/cleanse me** 2) **wash me** 3) **blot out all my guilt**.

Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean. Hyssop - a small plant (see [1 Kgs 4:33](#)) used to apply water or blood in purification rites (see [Exod 12:22](#); [Lev 14:4-6, 49-52](#); [Num 19:6-18](#)).

Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. While Israel does sometimes get snow, it is RARE and usually only in the higher mountain regions. In a world without modern bleach, nothing man-made could match the brilliance and purity of freshly fallen snow. David cries out—not just to be cleaned—but to be made *whiter than snow*—a purity only God can produce. The conviction David has felt was like having God crush his bones!

BIG TRUTH: God exposes the sin we hide to cleanse the sinner He loves.

David writes about his GUILT & seeking God's forgiveness in [Psalm 32](#):

Psalm 32:3-5

When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. For day and night Your Hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat. Then **I acknowledged my sin to you** and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, "**I will confess my transgressions to the Lord**," and You forgave the guilt of my sin.

You & I have experienced that heaviness too...haven't we? God refuses to let those who belong to him become comfortable in sin. And if you ARE...then this should cause pause. You can't belong to HIM and stay in sin.

Psalm 51:9

Turn your Face away from my sins and **blot out** all my guilt.

Turn your face away. To "hide the face" *normally implies God's hiding from the sinner* (cf. [Ps 13:1](#); [27:9](#); [30:7](#); [143:7](#)), but David pleads with Yahweh to "**hide his face**"—not from the sinner but **from his sins**.¹

Psalm 51:10-11

God, **create a clean heart for me** and **renew a steadfast spirit within me**. Do not banish me from Your Presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me.

David pleads with God to give him a **clean heart**, to renew the freshness of David's faithfulness from the past - with a **steadfast spirit** - that is standing upright and firm - not easily moved.

Do not...take Your Holy Spirit from me. Be careful not to immediately jump to the idea that God's Holy Spirit would leave us when we sin. Instead, we appreciate David's concern that, just as God's anointing by the Spirit left King Saul after his continued disobedience ([1 Sam 16:14](#)) and was transferred to David as king, he doesn't want God to strip him of the anointing to be king.

- Our fellowship with God can certainly be impacted when we sin. We can even grieve God's Spirit ([Eph 4:30](#)).

Psalm 51:12-13

Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit. Then **I will teach the rebellious Your ways**, and **sinners will return to You**.

Do you remember the **joy** you had upon being forgiven? Jesus points out that those who been forgiven much, love much ([Lk 7:47](#)).

Those who are forgiven much should be wanting to tell others how they can be forgiven much!

We often say, "Let's be like one beggar telling another beggar where to find the bread." **Cleanse Me. Restore Me. Use Me.**

¹ Gerald H. Wilson, Psalms, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 776.

Remember when David said, "Against You alone I have sinned." (Ps 51:4)? Here's the evidence that David didn't forget the wrong he had done to Uriah.

Psalm 51:14-17

Save me from the guilt of bloodshed, God— God of my salvation— and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise. You do not want a sacrifice, or I would give it; You are not pleased with a burnt offering. **The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit**. You will not despise **a broken and humbled heart**, God.

This is not someone pointing to his own goodness, but **praising** God for *HIS goodness!* - AND...telling others about it!

We can't pay God off with **sacrifices**. **God responds to people who humble themselves and take responsibility for their sin**. David was not saying there is no need for sacrifices - why just a few verses down, in verse 19, David wrote of offering God righteous sacrifices of bulls (after genuine repentance). David knows the *substitute sacrifices he offers mean NOTHING without humility & real repentance over sin*.

BIG TRUTH: God exposes the sin we hide to cleanse the sinner He loves.



► **Cry Out: "Cleanse Me!"** Stop hiding. Stop blaming others for YOUR sin. Run to God with honest confession.

► **Live Out: "I'm Clean!"** After you have been forgiven, walk **TOWARD** whatever and whoever helps you to be live clean, and walk **AWAY** from whatever and whoever would tempt you to disobey the King who died to make FULL PAYMENT for your sin. (Mt 5:27-30.)

heretoserveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Noel & Patricia Barnes** (813-767-2881), **Derek & Emily Beaty** (813-763-4421), or **Chris & Caitlin Day** (850-673-7920), **Glen & Margie Peacock** (850-464-1484).

Discussion questions

These questions are designed to help you LIVE what you LEARN with your family, friends, or small group.

1. Catch the Context

David wrote Psalm 51 after Nathan confronted him about his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. Why is it important that David's confession came after he had tried to cover his sin for months? What are some ways people still try to cover sin instead of confessing it?

2. "Cleanse Me!" Read Psalm 51:1-2.

David asks God to blot out, wash away, and cleanse his sin. What do these words teach us about how deeply David felt his guilt? Why do we sometimes want God to "excuse" our sin instead of truly cleansing us from it?

3. Honest Confession - Read Psalm 51:3-4.

David says, "I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me." What does unconfessed sin do to a person spiritually, emotionally, and relationally? Why is it both painful and gracious when God makes us unable to ignore our sin?

4. Sin Against God

David says, "Against You—You alone—I have sinned." Yet David had clearly sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah too.

What do you think David means? How does recognizing sin as being ultimately against God change the way we repent?

5. The Weight of Hidden Sin - Read Psalm 32:3-5.

David describes hidden sin as making his "bones brittle" and God's hand heavy upon him. Have you ever seen how hiding sin drains a person? Why is confession painful at first but freeing afterward?

6. A Deeper Problem - Read Psalm 51:5-6.

David recognizes that his problem is not only what he has done, but what is deeply rooted within him. Why is it important to confess both sinful actions and a sinful heart? What is the danger of treating sin as merely a "mistake" rather than rebellion against God?

7. Whiter Than Snow - Read Psalm 51:7-9.

David asks God to wash him until he is "whiter than snow." What does this image teach us about the kind of cleansing only God can give? Why do many people struggle to believe God can truly make them clean after serious sin?

8. "Restore Me!" Read Psalm 51:10-12.

David asks for a clean heart, a renewed spirit, and restored joy. What is the difference between wanting relief from consequences and wanting a renewed heart before God? How can someone know if they are truly repentant rather than simply sorry they got caught?

9. The Joy of Salvation

David asks God to restore the joy of His salvation. Why does sin steal joy from believers? What are some practical ways God restores joy after confession and repentance?

10. "Use Me!" Read Psalm 51:13-15.

David says that after being restored, he will teach sinners God's ways and sing of God's righteousness. Why does forgiven sin often create a powerful witness? How can someone share about God's mercy without glorifying or minimizing their past sin?

11. Broken and Humbled - Read Psalm 51:16-17.

David says God desires "a broken and humbled heart." What does that kind of heart look like in real life? What is the difference between worldly shame that drives us away from God and godly brokenness that draws us near to God?

12. Jesus, the Greater Sacrifice

David knew about animal sacrifices, but we now see that they pointed forward to Jesus. How does the cross show us both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God's mercy? Why can we say that Jesus is a greater Savior than our sin is a destroyer?

Feet2Faith

Cry Out: "Cleanse Me!"

What sin, shame, guilt, or hidden struggle do you need to stop covering and start confessing to God?

Live Out: "I'm Clean!"

What do you need to walk toward this week that will help you live forgiven? What do you need to walk away from this week that keeps tempting you to disobey the King who died to cleanse you?

Closing Prayer Prompt - Spend time praying through these three cries from Psalm 51: Cleanse me. Restore me. Use me.